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AUTHOR Roncelli, Janet M.
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ABSTRACT

One of the rhetorical dimensions on which theatre exists is the rhetoric of production. This implies that the production, through examples, takes and urges an attitude toward the text. This argument provides a foundation for both the nature and the implications of interpreters theatre productions that advocate social issues. Theatrical performances always deal with examples of anger, empty spaces, or accelerated tempo, and by set designers and directors giving concrete form to sets and characters, these things become concrete examples. Examples are rhetorical devices, and in the theatre examples exist not to serve a discursive end, but rather to imply the existence of human beings in action. Discursive playscripts use examples as support for propositions, so that the arguments are substantially weak and of secondary interest to the dramatic confrontation between characters. It is, however, this form of argument that strengthens interpreters theatre when applied in social contexts. The uniqueness of interpreters theatre in social contexts can be described by the term "access," which is defined as public performance for all citizens, not just experienced actors, and access both to the history and geography of a community's heritage and to the discussion of sociopolitical issues. By utilizing both the rhetorical and the poetic/dramatic elements in a unique manner, and by the use of nontraditional literature, audiences, and performers, interpreters theatre may become the megatrend that leads to a revival of man's classical beginnings, when oral interpretation was used to disseminate information and opinion. (CRH)

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THE RHETORICAL DIMENSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF INTERPRETERS THEATRE IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

by

Janet M. Roncelli
Assistant Professor
Indiana University-Purdue University
at Fort Wayne

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The Rhetorical Dimensions and Implications
Of Interpreters Theatre in Social Contexts

In the essay entitled, "The Rhetoric of Theatre," Paul Campbell argues that one of the rhetorical dimensions on which theatre exists is the rhetoric of production. This implies that the production, through examples, "takes and urges an attitude toward the text."[1] An analysis of Campbell's argument provides the basis for an interesting theoretical perspective toward interpreters theatre in social contexts, particularly those productions which advocate social issues. In fact, Campbell's argument provides a rhetorical foundation for both the nature and the implications of interpreters theatre productions which advocate social issues.

Campbell begins his argument on the rhetoric of production by stating that theatrical performances always deal with examples, "examples of anger, or empty spaces, or accelerated tempos . . . "(14). For instance, in the playscript, the reader encounters dialogue that suggests the way a character looks or utters a line. However, in the performance of that playscript, the way the character looks and utters a line is specified, concrete, and immediate. Designers use specific shades of color and specific dimensions for a flat. Actors and actresses speak and move in a particular way. Thus, attitudes, and colors, volume, movements, and forms, for instance become specified and concrete examples when enacted on stage (14).

Examples are rhetorical devices; or, as Aristotle would say, "proofs common to all rhetoric."[2] Similar to induction, examples imply that

something exists. It is Campbell's contention that in theatre, examples exist not to serve a discursive end, but rather to imply the existence of human beings in action. He uses the example of Brecht's Mother Courage: "When Mother Courage trudges off to another battlefield at the end of the play, we are not given a propositional argument about the devastating effect of the profit motive; we are presented with an example of that effect, the sheer existence of which is awesome" (p. 16). In other words, theatre is a nondiscursive form that consists of a series of examples which do not move rationally from premises to conclusions. In and of themselves, examples "constitute a rhetoric of great power" (p. 16). More specifically, Campbell states that examples are the basis for identification:

> Because the characters and actions portrayed seem so immediate, seem so clearly to be, spectators can project themselves into those characters. And the act of identification, rather than an enthymematic process leading to the construction of an argument, it is the essential response of the theatre audience. (p. 16)

While Campbell suggests that theatre always depends on the example as its fundamental rhetorical device, he cautions us against those playscripts which use examples as support for a proposition. Discursive arguments in plays such as Inherit the Wind and Anouilh's Antigone are substantially weak and of secondary interest to the dramatic confrontation between Darrow and Bryan and Antigone and Creon (pp. 16-17). Moreover, Campbell argues that plays in which the arguments are not incidental to the action diminish the theatrical form (18). Campbell cites plays like Shaw's Man and Superman, Odet's Waiting for Lefty, and the Living Theatre's Paradise Now as instances wherein "example yields to argument" (p. 18). Such plays move from "theatre of example to theatre of assertion" (p. 18). Such plays, Campbell argues

"have little artistic merit" (p. 18). When theatre depends on the discursive form, Campbell contends that the play loses the "potency of a visualized example" (p. 18). He concludes:

> To say as much is to say that theatre, as theatre, is not capable of treating complex ethical issues, of analyzing intricate political situations, or of presenting philosophical treatises on such matters as freedom, progress, evil, etc., for each of these requires extensive and careful discursive argument. Theatre's power is the living example, and that is also its limitation. Therefore, theatre cannot explain the nature of tyrannyor the basis of feminism; what it can do is offer the examples of Creon and Nora Helmer. (pp. 18-19)

If discursive argument weakens the dramatic form of theatre, then perhaps it is this same form of argument which strengthens interpreters theatre in social contexts. In the essay, "From Academic to Social-Political Uses of Performances," Kay Ellen Capo employs the term access as the key to describing the uniqueness of interpreters theatre in social contexts.[3] It affords access 1) to public performance for all citizens, not just experienced actors; 2) to the history and geography of a community's heritage; and 3) to the discussion of sociopolitical issues.[4] Furthermore, the notion of access implies that the function of interpreters theatre extends beyond the aesthetic or consummatory end. Interpreters theatre is being employed for advocacy, therapy, education, and documentary. Capo and others contend that the advocacy of social and political issues is what distinguishes this type of interpreters theatre as rhetorical in nature.[5]

If interpreters theatre that advocates social issues involves the use of an aesthetic means to achieve a rhetorical or instrumental end, then such theatre is what Campbell calls theatre of assertion.[6] It is a type of theatre where examples yield to argument and argument becomes the primary action on stage. All examples of human situations, whether fact, fiction, or hypothetical, become support for premises in the argument. The dramatic action becomes subordinate to the argument which becomes the primary focus of the production. Therefore, interpreters theatre of advocacy is a move away from Campbell's theatre of example and a move toward a better understanding of the rhetorical nature and function of interpreters theatre in social contexts.

Not only is interpreters theatre in social contexts more rhetorical because it serves an instrumental end, but it is no less theatrical than the theatre of example which Campbell describes as serving a consummatory end. Let me explain by referring to three trends of interpreters theatre in social contexts: the use of 1) nontraditional literature, 2) nontraditional performers, and 3) nontraditional audiences.[7]

The use of nontraditional literature such as nonfiction and oral histories highlights both the rhetorical and the dramatic dimensions of narration in performance. Whether we examine the arguments of the classicists like Aristotle and Cicero or a contemporary like Wayne Booth, we discover that narration is a rhetorical device.[8] But Cicero is the most interesting to examine in terms of the dramatic of narration. He divided narration into two classes: "one concerned with events, the other principally with persons."[9] The form of narrative concerned with persons contains not only the events, but the conversation and the mental attitudes of characters."[10] Cicero states that as a form of invention, narration of persons should do the following:

> This form of narrative should possess great vivacity, resulting from fluctuations of fortune, contrast of characters, severity, gentleness, hope, fear, suspicion, desire, dissimulation, delusion, pity, sudden change of fortune, unexpected disaster, sudden pleasure, a happy ending to the story.[11]

Directors of interpreters theatre productions pride themselves on their ability to stage such narrative and bring out what Cicero knew long ago was the evocative or dramatic nature of narration. What Campbell fears as being "too talky" and "inactive" is a problem not of the playscript so much as it is a problem of understanding how to stage the narration, particularly when it deals with internal dialogue (p. 17).

The use of nontraditional performers, such as the elderly or the handicapped, who enact their own stories or who narrate the events of their lives, manifests itself on stage as highly dramatic and rhetorical. These performers demonstrate or exemplify what Campbell fears is lost in theatre of assertion--"the potency of the visualized example" (p. 19). What could be more specific, concrete, and immediate than a handicapped person demonstrating and narrating the problems of accessibility? And what could be more rhetorical than first-hand testimony which highlights the logos, pathos, and ethos of the argument?

The use of nontraditional audiences is the final element that exemplifies both the rhetorical and the dramatic dimensions of interpreters theatre in social contexts. Target audiences are inherent to the advocacy of social issues and to fulfilling the instrumental end of this kind of production.[12] Performances used to stimulate discussion of social issues and/or counter the popular images of a given group are what communication researchers

today report the citizens want.[13] Mass media theoriest John Ciampa argues that people of the eighties want "bidirectional dialogue" not "unidirectional monologue."[14] Ciampa cites conventional theatre as an example of what today's citizens do not want as a form of communication.[15] John Naisbett, author of Megatrends, asserts that the more our society becomes bombarded with information and high technology, the more we need to analyze or make sense of that information which is salient to us through high touch.[16]

> This is the need for human interaction. Naisbett's research indicates that citizens' action groups will be the policy makers in the future.[17] Target audiences, self-reliance, and local initiative represent the essence of interpreters theatre in social contexts. More importantly, the dramatic element in this type of theatre takes place not only on the stage, but between the members of the target audience. The action, so to speak, unfolds on stage, in the audience discussion, and afterwards.

What this essay suggests is that Campbell's caution against theatre of advocacy is unwarranted. Interpreters theatre in social contexts utilizes both the rhetorical and the poetic/dramatic elements in a unique manner. So unique is the nature of this type of interpretation that it just might become the megatrend that not only transforms the area of oral interpretation, but also plays a significant role in transforming the lives of others. Who knows? Interpreters theatre in social contexts might be the megatrend that leads not only to the future of oral interpretation, but to a revival of our classical beginnings--when oral interpretation was used to disseminate information and opinion.

Endnotes

[1] Paul Newell Campbell, "The Rhetoric of Theatre," The Southern Speech Journal, 48 (Fall 1982), 11-21.

[2] Aristotle The Rhetoric 2.18-23, 30, trans. Richard Claverhouse Jebb, in Readings in Classical Rhetoric, eds., Thomas W. Benson and Michael H. Prosser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 157.

[3] Kay Ellen Capo, "From Academic to Socio-Political Uses of Performance," in Performance of Literature in Historical Perspectives, ed. David W. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1983), p. 448.

[4] Capo, p. 448.

[5] See Capo, p. 447 and Marion Kleinau and Janet Larson McHughes, Theatres for Literature: A Practical Aesthetics for Group Interpretation (Sherman Oaks, CA: Alfred, 1980), pp. 292-302.

[6] Capo, p. 448.

[7] Capo, p. 438.

[8] See Aristotle The Poetics 1-4, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in Aristotle's Politics and Poetics (New York: Viking, 1957), pp. 223-65; Cicero De Inventione 1.18, 25.19, 27, trans. Harry Caplan, in Readings in Classical Rhetoric, pp. 196-99; Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Preface and pp. 3-64.

[9] Cicero De Inventione, p. 199.

[10] Cicero De Inventione, p. 199.

[11] Cicero De Inventione, p. 199.

[12] Target audiences include those groups of people who have needs and interests similar to those needs and interests fostered in the production. Thus, interpreters theatre productions in social contexts are designed to address specific issues for specific audiences.

[13] See Capo, pp. 448-53; John F. Deethardt, "Inventing Democracy: Future Alternatives for Social Action," Communication Education, 32 (April 1983), 153-66.

[14] John Ciampa, "Video Discs Suggest a New Theory of Interactive Media," Intermedia, 9 (September 1981), 46.

[15] Ciampa, p. 46.

[16] John Naisbett, Megatrends (New York: Warner, 1984), pp. 35-52.

[17] Naisbett, p. 281.